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**BEFORE THE BOARD OF PATENT APPEALS  
AND INTERFERENCES**

Application Number: 10/658,490  
Filing Date: September 08, 2003  
Appellant(s): HAGERMOSER ET AL.

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Nick Baumann  
For Appellant

**EXAMINER'S ANSWER**

This is in response to the appeal brief filed on December 02, 2008 appealing from the Office action mailed September 24, 2008.

**(1) Real Party in Interest**

A statement identifying by name the real party in interest is contained in the brief.

**(2) Related Appeals and Interferences**

The examiner is not aware of any related appeals, interferences, or judicial proceedings which will directly affect or be directly affected by or have a bearing on the Board's decision in the pending appeal.

**(3) Status of Claims**

The statement of the status of claims contained in the brief is correct.

**(4) Status of Amendments After Final**

The appellant's statement of the status of amendments after final rejection contained in the brief is correct.

**(5) Summary of Claimed Subject Matter**

The summary of claimed subject matter contained in the brief is correct.

**(6) Grounds of Rejection to be Reviewed on Appeal**

The appellant's statement of the grounds of rejection to be reviewed on appeal is correct.

**(7) Claims Appendix**

The copy of the appealed claims contained in the Appendix to the brief is correct.

**(8) Evidence Relied Upon**

7,109,978	Gillespie et al.	09-2006
7,084,859	Pryor	08-2006
5,942,815	Neuman et al.	08-1999

**(9) Grounds of Rejection**

The following ground(s) of rejection are applicable to the appealed claims:

Claims 1-7, 9-11, 13-16, 28-38, and 42 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as being unpatentable over Gillespie and Pryor, and further in view of Neuman.

As to claim 1, Gillespie teaches a touch input device ("*capacitive touch sensor*") [abstract lines 1-3] for interacting with electronic systems ("*computing devices*") [col. 1 lines 28-33], comprising:

a surface ("*insulating layer 36*") [fig. 2d] accessible to and touchable by an user of the input device [col. 6 lines 30-32]

a capacitive touch sensor ("*capacitive touch sensor pad*") configured so that a touch applied on the surface ("*insulating layer 36*") of the input device forms a circuit through the surface to the touch sensor (the capacitive coupling between the touch and the touch sensor is equivalent to a capacitor being existed between the touch and the touch sensor) that allows capacitive coupling between the touch and the touch sensor through the surface [col. 6 lines 28-32] [fig. 2d], the touch sensor adapted for connecting to a

controller ("*arithmetic unit*") that uses signals generated by the capacitive coupling to interact with electronic systems [col. 54 lines 29-37].

Gillespie does not expressly teach the touch input device to interact with multiple electronic systems included in the vehicle.

However, Pryor teaches a concept of implementing a capacitive touch panel ("*10*") [fig. 1c] used for interacting with multiple electronic systems [col. 56 lines 22-24] included in a vehicle [abstract lines 1-6], in a steering wheel of the vehicle, which includes an airbag [fig. 1c] [col. 7 lines 26-30 and col. 17 lines 13-17].

It would have been obvious to one of ordinary skill in the art at the time of the invention to apply Pryor's concept of using a capacitive touch panel as an inputting means for interacting with multiple electronic systems included in a vehicle and of implementing the capacitive touch panel in a steering wheel, to the touch input device of Gillespie, in order to provide fast response of sensing while maintaining immunity to high levels of electrical interference for a controlling means for interacting with multiple electronics of a vehicle.

Gillespie [Gillespie: fig. 2d] as modified by Pryor teaches the capacitive touch sensor being disposed behind an airbag cover (note that since, in the combination of Gillespie and Pryor, the "*insulating layer 36*" is the most front surface of the steering wheel and the airbag is included in the steering wheel, the "*insulating layer 36*" is a part of the airbag cover, which is an airbag surface).

Gillespie as modified by Pryor does not expressly disclose the capacitive touch sensor to be disposed between an airbag and an airbag cover.

However, Neuman teaches a structure of placing a capacitive sensor between an airbag (“704”) and an airbag cover layer (“*cover layer 702*”) [fig. 7].

It would have been obvious to one of ordinary skill in the art at the time of the invention to place the capacitive touch sensor of the input device of Gillespie as modified by Pryor between an airbag and an airbag cover, as taught by Neuman, in order to allow the user of the device of Gillespie as modified by Pryor to activate the input device without activating the airbag of the steering wheel.

Gillespie as modified by Pryor and Neuman inherently teaches the capacitive touch sensor being configured to reduce interference with airbag deployment since it is required for any car to deploy the airbag included in a steering wheel when it is necessary, regardless of the type of the components or parts of the car included in the steering wheel and thus Pryor inherently teaches a concept of configuring the capacitive touch sensor (which is a component/part of the vehicle included in the steering wheel) to reduce interferences with the airbag deployment.

As to claim 2, Gillespie as modified by Pryor and Neuman teaches the vehicle being an automobile [Pryor: fig. 1c].

As to claim 3, Gillespie as modified by Pryor and Neuman teaches an airbag cover [Neuman: fig. 7].

Gillespie as modified by Pryor and Neuman does not expressly disclose the airbag cover to include a surface comprising a relief pattern making the designated area.

However, examiner takes official notice that it is well known in the art at the time of the invention to include a relief pattern making a designated area, such as writing a text “*airbag*” on the surface of an airbag cover.

Therefore, it would have been obvious to one of ordinary skill in the art at the time of the invention to modify the surface of the airbag of Gillespie as modified by Pryor and Neuman to include a relief pattern making a designated area, in order to allow the device user of the device to recognize the existence of the airbag easily.

As to claim 4, Gillespie as modified by Pryor and Neuman teaches the airbag cover being on a steering wheel [Pryor: fig. 1c].

As to claims 5 and 7, Gillespie as modified by Pryor and Neuman does not teach the steering wheel incorporating additional touch sensors or additional capacitive sensors being positioned between the airbag and the airbag cover.

However, the courts have been held that a mere duplication of parts for a multiplied effect is generally recognized as being within the level of ordinary skill in the art. St. Regis Paper Co. v. Bemis Co., Inc., 193 USPQ 8, 11 (7<sup>th</sup> Cir. 1977).

Therefore, it would have been obvious to one of ordinary skill in the art at the time of the invention to implement additional capacitive touch sensors between the airbag and the airbag cover in the steering wheel of the device of Gillespie as modified by Pryor and Neuman to provide additional access to various electrical subsystems for the occupants of a vehicle.

As to claim 6, Gillespie as modified by Pryor and Neuman does not teach the airbag cover being on a passenger side of the vehicle.

However, the courts have been held that a mere change of location of parts is generally recognized as being within the level of ordinary skill in the art. *In re Japikse*, 86 USPQ 70 (CCPA 1950).

Therefore, it would have been obvious to one of ordinary skill in the art at the time of the invention to include an airbag cover and an airbag on a passenger side of the vehicle of Gillespie as modified by Pryor and Neuman to provide additional safety to the passenger of the vehicle.

As to claim 9, Gillespie teaches the capacitive touch sensor being an x-y sensor [abstract lines 1-3].

As to claims 10 and 11, Gillespie as modified by Pryor and Neuman does not expressly disclose the capacitive touch sensor being a quadrant segmented sensor or a scroll bar sensor.

However, since the applicants have failed to disclose that specifying the type of the capacitive touch sensor as a quadrant segmented sensor or a scroll bar sensor provides an advantage, is used for a particular purpose, or solves a state problem, it is an obvious matter of design choice to specify the type of the touch sensor as a quadrant segmented sensor, or a scroll bar sensor.

Therefore, it would have been obvious to one of ordinary skill in the art at the time of the invention to use any one of a x-y sensor, a quadrant segmented sensor, and a scroll bar sensor, as the capacitive touch sensor since any type of the sensor would perform equally well at processing capacitive touch-input information.



As to claims 13-15, Gillespie teaches the capacitive touch sensor comprising a substrate ("*substrate 24*") [fig. 2d].

Gillespie does not expressly teach a substrate of a capacitive touch sensor to comprise paper, cloth, or plastic.

However, since the applicants have failed to disclose that specifying the substrate of the capacitive touch sensor to be comprised of any one of paper, cloth, or plastic provides an advantage, is used for a particular purpose, or solves a state problem, it is an obvious matter of design choice to specify the substrate of the capacitive touch sensor to comprise any one of paper, cloth, or plastic.

Therefore, it would have been obvious to one of ordinary skill in the art at the time of the invention to use any one of nonconductive materials such as paper, cloth, and plastic for the substrate of the capacitive sensor since any one of nonconductive material would perform equally well at preventing particles being transferred or leaked from the capacitive touch sensor

As to claim 16, Gillespie as modified by Pryor and Neuman teaches the airbag cover providing a substrate (Gillespie: "*insulating layer 36*") for the capacitive touch sensor [Gillespie: fig. 2d].

As to claim 28, all of the claim limitations have already been discussed with respect to the rejection of claim 1 except for that the presence of the touch sensor maintains the look, feel, and functionality of the surface as if the touch sensor was excluded and the capacitive touch sensor is integrated with the surface in the vehicle and configured to enable unimpeded safety functionality of the surface in the vehicle (since it

is required for any car to deploy the airbag included in a steering wheel when it is necessary, regardless of the type of the components or parts of the car included in the steering wheel and thus Pryor inherently teaches a concept of configuring the capacitive touch sensor to enable unimpeded deployment of the airbag).

Gillespie teaches that the presence of the touch sensor maintains the look, feel, and functionality of the surface as if the touch sensor was excluded since the surface ("*insulating layer 36*") covers the whole portion of the touch sensor [fig. 2d].

Gillespie as modified by Pryor teaches the capacitive touch sensor being integrated with the surface in the vehicle [Pryor: fig. 1c] and configured to enable unimpeded safety functionality of the surface in the vehicle.

As to claims 29, 30, 32, and 33, Gillespie as modified by Pryor and Neuman [Pryor: fig. 1c] teaches the surface being a surface of a steering wheel (Pryor: "10"), a dashboard (Pryor: "13"), a center console (Pryor: "11"), or an arm rest (Pryor: "14").

As to claims 31 and 34, Gillespie as modified by Pryor and Neuman does not expressly disclose the surface being a visor or a seat cover.

However, the courts have been held that a mere change of location of parts is generally recognized as being within the level of ordinary skill in the art. *In re Japikse*, 86 USPQ 70 (CCPA 1950).

Therefore, it would have been obvious to one of ordinary skill in the art at the time of the invention to place the input device of Gillespie as modified by Pryor and Neuman on a visor or a seat cover of a vehicle, in order to provide multiple ways of accessing the input device to the occupants of the vehicle.

As to claim 35, all of the claim limitations have already been discussed with respect to the rejection of claim 27.

As to claim 36, Gillespie [fig. 2d] teaches the capacitive touch sensor (“*capacitive touch sensor pad*”) being an off-display capacitive touch sensor characterized by an absence of a display screen.

As to claim 37, Gillespie teaches the surface (“*insulating layer 36*”) [fig. 2d] being not a display screen.

As to claim 38, Gillespie as modified by Pryor and Neuman teaches the capacitive touch sensor comprising a projected capacitive touch sensor (the capacitive touch sensor of Gillespie is capable of detecting touches through dielectric layer) and the surface comprises an opaque surface (Gillespie: “*insulating layer 36*”) [Gillespie: fig. 2d].

As to claim 42, Gillespie as modified by Pryor and Neuman teaches the capacitive touch sensor being embedded in the airbag cover [Pryor: fig. 1c, the airbag cover is the cover of the center portion of the steering wheel].

Claims 23 and 27 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as being unpatentable over Gillespie in view of Pryor.

As to claim 23, Gillespie teaches a method of making a touch input device (“*capacitive touch sensor*”) [abstract lines 1-3], comprising:

providing a capacitive touch sensor (“*capacitive touch sensor pad*”) configured so that a touch to a designated area of a surface (“*insulating layer 36*”) of the input device allows capacitive coupling between the touch and the touch sensor through the surface [col. 6 lines 28-32] [fig. 2d],

connecting the touch sensor to a controller (“*arithmetic unit*”) [col. 54 lines 29-37];  
and

using signals generated by the capacitive coupling to interact with electronic systems [col. 54 lines 29-37].

Gillespie does not expressly teach the method comprising providing an airbag cover configured for enclosing an airbag in a vehicle and for providing a finished surface, disposing the capacitive touch sensor on a back surface of the airbag cover opposing the finished surface, using the capacitive touch sensor to interact with one of radio controls, a heads-up display, a heating/cooling blower, a navigation system, and a hands-free phone of the vehicle.

However, Pryor teaches an idea of providing an airbag cover (the exterior surface of the steering wheel) [col. 7 lines 26-28] configured for enclosing an airbag in a vehicle and for providing a finished surface, disposing the capacitive touch sensor on a back surface of the airbag cover opposing the finished surface, using the capacitive touch sensor to interact with one of radio controls [col. 56 lines 22-24], a heads-up display, a heating/cooling blower, a navigation system, and a hands-free phone of the vehicle [abstract lines 1-6].

It would have been obvious to one of ordinary skill in the art at the time of the invention to apply Pryor’s idea of using a capacitive touch panel as an inputting means for a radio included in a vehicle, to the touch input device of Gillespie, in order to provide fast response of sensing while maintaining immunity to high levels of electrical interference for a controlling means for electronics of a vehicle.

Gillespie as modified by Pryor inherently teaches configuring the capacitive touch sensor to minimally interfere with airbag deployment since it is required for any car to deploy the airbag included in a steering wheel when it is necessary, regardless of the type of the components or parts of the car included in the steering wheel and thus Pryor inherently teaches a concept of configuring the capacitive touch sensor (which is a component/part of the vehicle included in the steering wheel) to minimally interfere with airbag deployment.

As to claim 27, Gillespie as modified by Pryor teaches marking the designated area with a relief pattern.

Gillespie as modified by Pryor does not expressly disclose that the relief pattern can be discerned by a user's tactile senses.

However, the Examiner takes official notice that it is well known in the art to have a pattern, figure, or drawing such as a horn-shaped figure on a steering wheel that can be discerned by a user's tactile senses.

Therefore, it would have been obvious to one of ordinary skill in the art at the time of the invention to modify the device of Gillespie as modified by Pryor to comprise a relief pattern on a designated area to be discerned by a user's tactile senses, in order to allow the user to find a location of the electronic components placed under the steering wheel cover, and thus to operate the electronic components easily.

**(10) Response to Argument**

**Claims 1 and 28** - *"A. The cited references teach away from a capacitive touch sensor disposed between the airbag and the airbag cover"* [Appeal, pg 7]

The Applicant emphasizes [Appeal, pg 8 bottom portion] that Pryor discloses, "*Some requirements of an Automobile display/touch sensor could arguably be at least the following: 1. Sturdy - ... 7. Not sacrifice airbag function – thus must not be where the airbag is, or the airbag/and sensor module must be of another design (one of which is disclosed herein)*" and explains [Appeal, pg 9 top portion] the differences between Pryor's figures 3 and 4, and concludes [Appeal, pg 9 2<sup>nd</sup> full paragraph], "*Consequently, Gillespie as modified by Pryor results in, at most, a readable/each-to-touch sensor forward of an airbag. Thus, the combination does not provide a touch sensor disposed behind an airbag cover, as argued by the Examiner*".

Examiner respectfully disagrees.

First of all, regarding the Applicant's above conclusion [Appeal, pg 9 2<sup>nd</sup> full paragraph], the fact of whether Gillespie as modified by Pryor results in a readable/each-to-touch sensor forward of an airbag or not does not explain anything regarding whether the combination of the references, i.e. Gillespie and Pryor, provides a touch sensor disposed behind an airbag cover or not. Second, as cited by the Applicant, Pryor discloses, "*Not sacrifice airbag function – thus must not be where the airbag is, or the airbag/and sensor module must be of **another design** (one of which is disclosed herein)*". Pryor merely discloses that the touch sensor should not sacrifice airbag function and thus the touch sensor must not be where the airbag is unless the touch sensor has another design, but does not disclose the touch sensor having the structure which is same as the structure of Gillespie's touch sensor cannot be implemented where the

airbag is. Accordingly, Examiner respectfully submits that the Applicant's arguments regarding the obviousness of combining the references based on the quoted part of Pryor's specification is improper because the quoted part of Pryor's specification does not exclude Gillespie's touch sensor from being one of various alternate designs of an airbag which can be implemented in a steering wheel.

**Claims 1 and 28** – *"1. The purported combination changes the principle operation of the references."* [Appeal, pg 9]

The Applicant argues [Appeal, pg 9 last full paragraph] that modifying Gillespie in view of Pryor and Neuman would render Gillespie unsatisfactory for its intended purpose of keeping capacitive coupling large since the combination of the references would result in replacing Gillespie's thin insulating layer with the airbag cover or requiring the entire structure illustrated in figure 2d of Gillespie be disposed between an airbag and its cover.

Examiner respectfully disagrees.

As clearly explained in the Final Office Action mailed on September 24, 2008 [pg 6 3rd full paragraph], the combination of the references would result in Gillespie's thin insulating layer being the most front surface (emphasis added) of the steering wheel and being a part of the airbag cover included in the steering wheel. Accordingly, Examiner respectfully submits that the Applicant's interpretation regarding the combination of the references is incorrect and thus the above arguments that the combination of the references would change the principle operation of Gillespie's touch sensor are not persuasive.

The Applicant further argues [Appeal, pg 10 1st full paragraph] that modifying Gillespie in view of Pryor and Neuman would render Pryor unsatisfactory for its intended purpose of providing a sensor that can be touched with a pen.

However, Examiner respectfully submits that the modifying Gillespie in view of Pryor is not based on the concept of incorporating the whole structure of Pryor's touch sensor into the structure of Gillespie's touch sensor, but is merely based on the concept of using Pryor's idea, i.e. including a touch sensor in a steering wheel, to determine where to place Gillespie's touch sensor. Accordingly, Examiner respectfully submits that the Applicant's arguments that the combination of the references would change the principle operation of Pryor's touch sensor are not persuasive.

**Claims 1 and 28** – “2. *Critical differences between the claims and the references have been ignored.*” [Appeal, pg 10]

The Applicant argues [Appeal, pg 10 3<sup>rd</sup> full paragraph] that Gillespie's touch sensor is incompatible with a capacitive touch sensor disposed between an airbag and an airbag cover or with a capacitive touch sensor disposed behind a surface in a vehicle.

However, Examiner respectfully submits that the Applicant has failed to explain why Gillespie's touch sensor is incompatible with a capacitive touch sensor disposed between an airbag and an airbag cover or with a capacitive touch sensor disposed behind a surface in a vehicle. Furthermore, the structure of the capacitive touch sensor disclosed in the claims is taught by Gillespie and the claims do not disclose any specific element that would differentiate the capacitive touch sensor of the instant invention from Gillespie's touch sensor and would allow only the capacitive touch sensor of the instant invention to be compatible with a capacitive touch



sensor disposed between an airbag and an airbag cover or with a capacitive touch sensor disposed behind a surface in a vehicle.

The Applicant's arguments regarding the quoted part of Pryor's specification [Appeal, pg 10 4<sup>th</sup> paragraph] are not persuasive for the same reasons disclosed in page 13 last paragraph - page 14 1st paragraph of this correspondence. The Applicant arguments that Pryor's touch screen should not be behind an airbag cover or between an airbag and an airbag cover [Appeal, pg 10 5<sup>th</sup> paragraph] are not persuasive for the same reasons disclosed in pg 15 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> paragraph of this correspondence.

**Claims 1 and 28** – "*B. The pending claims are non-obvious under KSR.*" [Appeal pg 10]

The Applicant argues [Appeal, pg 10 last full paragraph], "*Relying upon KSR, Appellant's position is that a patent composed of several elements is not proved obvious merely by demonstrating that each of its elements was, independently, known in the prior art.*"

However, Examiner respectfully submits that the concept behind the modification of Gillespie in view of Pryor and Neuman is not combining the whole structures/components of each of the references together, but is merely using the concepts of Pryor and Neuman to determine where to place/use Gillespie's touch sensor.

The Applicant's arguments disclosed in page 11 1<sup>st</sup> full paragraph of the Appeal Brief are not persuasive for the same reasons disclosed in page 15 1st and 2nd full paragraphs (regarding the applicant's arguments that Pryor's touch screen would not be touchable/readable) and disclosed in page 14 2nd and 3rd full paragraphs (regarding the Applicant's arguments that the

airbag cover would not be thin enough to keep the capacitive coupling large) of this correspondence.

**Claims 1 and 28** – “*C. Obviousness cannot be proven merely by showing that a known composition could have been modified by routine experimentation or solely on the expectation success.*” [Appeal, pg 11]

Regarding the Applicant's arguments disclosed under Section C on page 11 of the Appeal Brief, Examiner respectfully submits that the Applicant merely cites a recent opinion of the Board of Patent Appeals and Interferences, but the Applicant has failed to explain how the recent opinion of the Board of Patent Appeals and Interferences would support the Applicant's arguments.

**Claims 1 and 28** – “*D. That the capacitive touch sensor is configured to reduce interference with airbag deployment is not inherent in the cited references, nor would this claimed feature be recognized as inherent by persons of ordinary skill.*” [Appeal, pg 12]

The Applicant argues [Appeal, pg 12 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> full paragraphs] that none of the cited references teach or suggest touch sensors in relationship to deployed airbags.

Examiner respectfully disagrees.

Pryor teaches a concept of placing a touch sensor in a steering wheel which includes an airbag. Since the airbag must be deployed properly to protect a driver of a vehicle including the steering wheel, the touch sensor included in the steering wheel must be configured to minimize interference with the airbag deployment. Thus, Pryor does teach a concept of configuring a touch sensor included in a steering wheel to reduce interference with airbag deployment.

The Applicant further argues [Appeal, pg 12 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> full paragraphs], “*None of the references, alone or in combination, make clear that the missing descriptive matter of the interaction of a touch screen with airbag deployment is necessarily present in the reference. In fact, Pryor imposes a requirement that in order to not sacrifice airbag function, the touch screen must not be where the airbag is*”.

However, Examiner respectfully submits that Pryor [col. 4 lines 57-60] clearly discloses that the touch screen should not be where the airbag is or (emphasis added) the airbag/and screen module must be another design. In other words, Pryor does not teach that the touch screen cannot be included where the airbag is, but merely teaches that the airbag or the touch screen must be configured to reduce interference with airbag deployment.

**Claims 23 and 27 – “III. Claims 23 and 27 (including independent claim 23) are not rendered obvious under over Gillespie in view of Pryor.” [Appeal, pg 13]**

The Applicant’s arguments regarding the deployment of the airbag [Appeal, pg 13 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> full paragraphs] are not persuasive for the same reasons disclosed in last paragraph on page 17 of this correspondence.

The Applicant’s arguments that Pryor does not teach disposing a capacitive touch sensor on a back surface of an airbag cover [Appeal, 13 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> paragraphs] are not persuasive because modifying Gillespie in view of Pryor is not based on the concept of combining the structure of Pryor’s touch screen with the structure of Gillespie’s touch screen, but is based on the concept of including Gillespie’s touch screen in a steering wheel by using one of Pryor’s teachings.

**(11) Related Proceeding(s) Appendix**

No decision rendered by a court or the Board is identified by the examiner in the Related Appeals and Interferences section of this examiner's answer.

For the above reasons, it is believed that the rejections should be sustained.

Respectfully submitted,

/Seokyun Moon/  
Examiner, Art Unit 2629  
February 25, 2009

Conferees:

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